

Bill No. 1013 AN ACT REQUIRING ACUTE CARE HOSPITALS TO MAKE FORENSIC NURSING SERVICES AVAILABLE TO PATIENTS.

February 21, 2007

Senator Handley, Representative Sayers, and members of the Public Health Committee, I, Nickia Hearst, strongly support Bill No. 1013, an act which will require acute care hospitals to make forensic nursing services available to patients.

I am a nurse in critical and trauma care. Working in a Level 1 trauma center, I have cared for many patients of traumatic injuries. I have evaluated and treated victims of interpersonal violence such as gunshot and stabbing injuries, sexual assault, domestic violence, elder abuse, and police custody injuries. As healthcare providers, nurses are seeing an increase in the number of victims of violent acts and perpetrators who present to the hospital for treatment. Every hospital regardless of its size and location comes into contact with these patients on some level. The hospital is the first point of contact in the early post trauma stage. Therefore, forensic nurses are in the best position to gather any information and physical evidence that could be linked to a crime. Unfortunately, this evidence is now lost because forensic nursing is not present.

The increase in violence has created a public health burden. Traumatic injury is now the leading cause of death for infants, children, and adults. It is extremely important as healthcare providers to provide protection of our patients' legal, civil, and human rights.

Forensic nurses are designed to offer one solution to the existing medicolegal problems in the clinical setting. Evidence would be identified and collected appropriately. The chain of custody would be maintained and evidence may not be lost due to improper management. The forensic nurse would be extremely beneficial in assisting the hospitals in developing proper forensic protocols related to evidence collection, photodocumentation, mandatory reporting, and in providing supportive services for victims.

Forensic nursing services in hospitals are an essential component to combat criminal and interpersonal violence by helping to increase the number of successful prosecution. Forensic nursing provides an important link in interagency collaboration between hospitals, the legal system, and social services in the community, and are a useful tool in addressing the huge social burden of violence.

I strongly urge the support of Bill # 1013, which if passed will provide a powerful response to the health and societal issues resulting from the ever increasing occurrences of interpersonal violence. Thank you,

Nickia S. Hearst BSN, MSN © RN